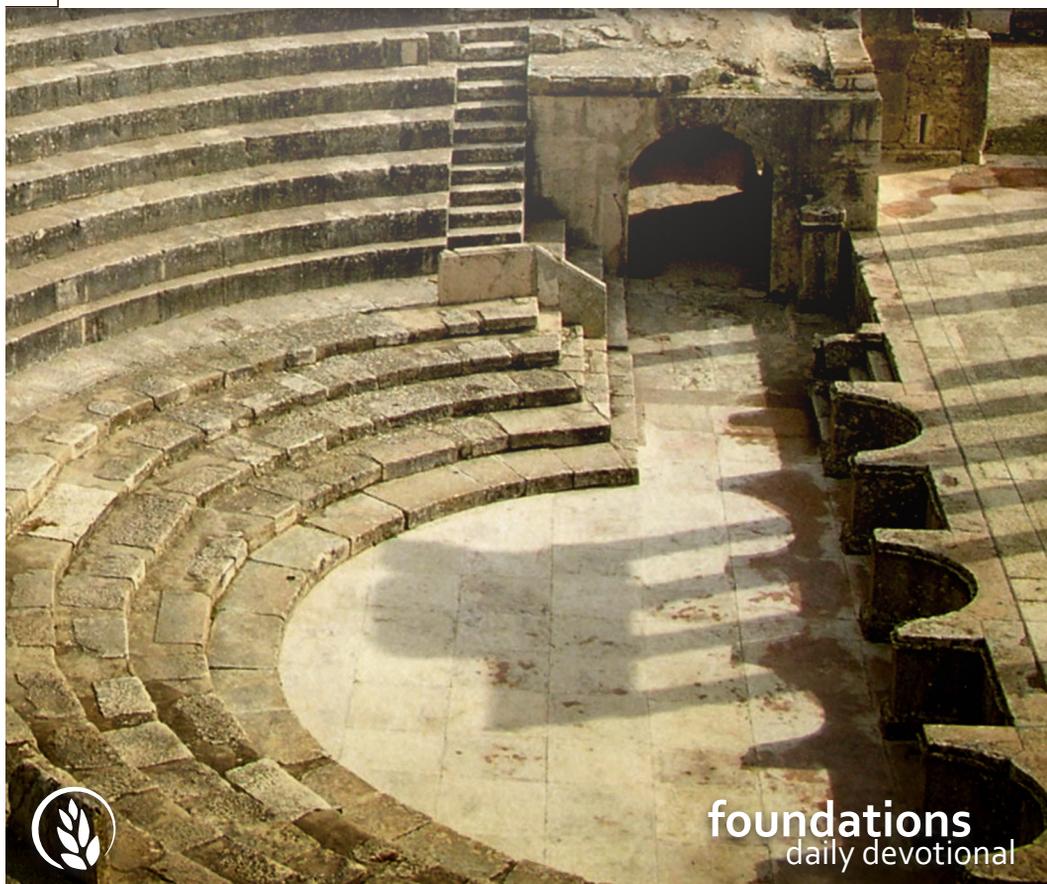




SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE EPISTLE TO THE
GALATIANS

7 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional



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GALATIANS

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SOUTHLAND
CHURCH

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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

DAY 1**READ:** Introduction to Galatians, if your Bible has one

The Epistle to the Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul to a group of churches. Galatia was a region in the Roman Empire that can be found in modern-day Turkey. At this point in church history, most believers had Jewish backgrounds. However, the Galatians were Gentile converts to Christianity, making this letter particularly relatable to Christians today.

The heart of this letter revolves around the role of Mosaic Law in the Christian life. Since God gave the Law at Mount Sinai, His people have been trying to draw closer to Him through obedience. How has this changed through the Cross? Paul writes to the Galatians to reinforce the importance of salvation through faith alone, while acknowledging the reality that a life surrendered to Christ will display the fruit of righteousness.

Throughout Galatians, we will see Paul exercising his spiritual gift of teaching. From explanations of how the Law leads us to Christ (chapter 3), to insight into well-known Old Testament stories (chapter 4), to details about what the new life in Christ should look like (chapters 5-6), the Epistle to the Galatians has much insight for the Church. However, the fact that this letter was ever written displays that Paul combined his spiritual gifts with a deep love for God's people. Paul could have said, "I've taught them the Gospel once and they've chosen to forsake it," and washed his hands of the Galatians. However, he knew Christ's love for the churches in Galatia and therefore worked to guide them back to the right path. We can see in Galatians that Paul was not merely a gifted scholar and teacher; he was one who loved others deeply and served God faithfully.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What role do you think the Law of Moses plays in the lives of Christians today? Write down your thoughts and questions about this topic in your journal. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you study Galatians. Pray that he will open your heart to truth about the tension between faith and works in Christianity.
2. Paul diligently used his spiritual gifts with servanthearted love. Ask God to show you how He has gifted you. For example, maybe you are gifted in ministering to children, intercession, hospitality or evangelism. Ask Him to show you how you can grow in using this gift in a spirit of faithful love.
3. Pray for leaders today. Pray that, like Paul, they would diligently exercise their gifts in a spirit of servanthearted love. Pray that they would measure their success not by worldly standards, but by Christ's standards. Pray these things for your Church leadership; local, provincial and federal politicians; teachers and school administrators; parents; business owners; and any other leaders that come to mind.

DAY 2**READ:** Galatians 1:1-10

Imagine yourself as a member of a Galatian church. You have gathered for a meeting. The Apostle Paul has written a letter to be read aloud to the entire assembly of local believers. This letter you are about to read will not be filled with feel-good platitudes or vague encouragements that you are “on the right track” (even if you really are not). After a short salutation (v 1-5), Paul launches into a direct rebuke: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all” (v 6-7a). You, as part of the Galatian church, have been taught the truth. You know that “the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (v 3b-4). However, since you first received this truth, false teachers have approached your community. They have presented their take on the good news of Jesus Christ. What they spoke sounded fine to you. After all, they were talking about Jesus. On the contrary, Paul says that their teachings are not good news at all.

The letter goes on to say that it does not matter who the teacher is: if what they say contradicts the truth about who Christ is and what He has done, you are to reject them completely. Knowing what some in your group must be thinking, Paul ends his rebuke with a clarification. He is not merely writing to gain more converts. His ministry is not about having more followers than anybody else. No, his ministry is about pleasing God. Paul is writing not to gain your approval, he is writing to ensure that you may receive your place in heaven.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect on the people who have influence in your life. These may be people you interact with directly (family, employers, etc.) or people you do not know personally (authors you read, preachers you listen to on the internet, etc). Many people claim to be speaking for Christ and if they use the right combinations of words, they can sound convincing. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you evaluate their influence. Do they lead you to the gospel of Jesus Christ (v 3-5)? Or does their guidance contradict Scripture? Ask God to help you discern godly influences from ungodly ones. Where He shows you false, ungodly influences, ask for His wisdom in how to stop following their guidance.
2. Unlike the Galatian church, we have the gift of a complete Bible. It is the measuring line against which we can test all teaching we receive. We can know that teaching is sound and beneficial if it lines up with the Scriptures. We can know that teaching is false and harmful if it contradicts the Scriptures. We will be held accountable for how we use the gift of the Bible. Do you regularly evaluate what you’re learning against the measuring line of Scripture? Do you even know Scripture well enough to do this?
3. Pray for a love of Scripture to permeate the Church in Canada. Pray that believers from all walks of life would diligently seek truth in the Bible. Pray that as believers read their Bibles they would encounter God personally.

Pray that pastors and Church leaders would model a love for God's Word to their congregations. Pray that confused or unsure believers would find firm foundations in the Word of God and that believers in danger of being led astray would find safety in God's truth. Pray that God would even guide unbelievers to His Word and that, as they open the pages of Scripture, He would meet them with His saving power.

DAY 3

READ: Galatians 1:11-2:21

A clearer understanding of the social and cultural context of the Galatian Church helps us understand this passage. As mentioned in Day 1 of this devotional, Galatian Christians were predominantly Gentiles. They had not been raised to follow Jewish customs, such as circumcision and dietary restrictions. When they became Christians, the Galatians saw no need to adopt these Jewish customs. However, most of the worldwide church at this point in history had a personal background in Judaism. When they converted to Christianity, many continued to practice their cultural customs. Jewish Christians had been raised to obey the Law as their way of pleasing God. The question of whether or not to obey the Law was creating disunity in the Church and confusion in Gentile believers (1:7). Paul answers this dilemma using three examples from his own life.

First, Paul describes how he came to follow Jesus (1:11-24). He was once passionate about Jewish traditions and laws (1:14). In fact, he was so passionate that he persecuted Christians because he thought they were heretics (1:13). Paul was not saved through his own obedience to the Law. Paul was saved when he submitted his life to the truth he received from a personal revelation of Jesus Christ (1:11, see also Acts 9).

The second illustration Paul gives is a situation that happened many years after his conversion. "False brothers" joined Paul's group and tried to convince them that obedience to Jewish cultural laws was vital to following Christ (2:3-4). Paul did not give in to these men (2:5). Church leaders in Jerusalem upheld Paul's stance, agreeing that there is no obligation for Christians to obey Jewish cultural laws.

The final illustration Paul gives is an interaction he had with Peter, Jesus' disciple (2:11-14). Peter used to eat meals with Gentile believers, in obedience to a revelation he had received from God (2:12, Acts 10-11). However, he had given way to fear of man and ceased this fellowship with Gentile believers. This passage ends with an explanation of Peter's errors (2:15-21). We might summarize Paul's message in these seven verses as follows: We, who grew up Jewish, understand that obedience to the Law cannot save us. Therefore, we submitted our lives to Christ, understanding that his work on the cross has the power to save us. Since we have altered our lives to fit this truth, why force Gentile believers to submit to the Law?



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Meditate on Galatians 2:15-21.
 - a. Re-write this passage in your own words. If you were to explain this passage to someone what would you say?
 - b. Write down any questions you have about this passage. Wrestle through them, asking God for greater insight. If you are unsure of anything, ask a trusted, godly person to work through these verses with you.
 - c. Armed with a greater intellectual understanding of these verses, re-read them once more. This time, ask God to speak directly to your heart through these words. Ask Him to show you how they apply to you personally. Thank Him for what He revealed to you.
2. Whenever we experience truth in Scripture we are presented with two choices: humbly adjust our lives to align with Scripture or pridefully continue on in our ways. Does anything in your life need to change in response to what you read today? Ask God for grace to live according to His Word.
3. Pray for your family today. Ask God how you can intercede for each individual family member and for your family as a whole. Take your time with this. Prayer is vital for healthy families and healthy families are vital for a healthy church and a healthy society. Once you are finished praying for your family. Ask God to show you one or two families you know that He wants you to pray for today. Again, ask Him how you can specifically pray for these families and then intercede for them.

DAY 4

 **READ:** Galatians 3

Each of us began our walk with Christ by the work of the Spirit, not our own doing (John 6:44). How often we fall into deception as we continue forward in our walks. As we become familiar with the Bible and “church culture,” we begin to alter our behaviour. This is not entirely a negative process. It is pleasing to God when we repent of sin and obey Him out of love (John 14:15, 1 John 5:3, and many more verses). The problem arises when we begin to believe that our obedience can result in true, eternal life (v 21b). Very few Christians would say outright, “I am going to heaven because I do my best to follow God’s law.” Legalism is a more subtle belief than that. It is a hidden condition found in the heart that refuses to fully trust Christ for salvation. It is the prideful belief that Christ’s work on the cross is not enough.

Galatians 3 addresses this issue in the lives of believers. We are made right through faith in Christ, not because of our own good works. We will not enter heaven because we did good deeds. We will enter heaven because we chose to place our trust entirely in Christ. God’s plan for salvation has always hinged on our faith, not on our works (v 6-9, 18). However, in His sovereignty, God knew that there was a

perfect time to send His Son to die for our sins. Until this time, mankind could not fully understand salvation through faith. God gave the law as a practical guide for His chosen people (Israel) until the time came for Christ to reveal the fullness of God's plan (v 23-24). The Law protected Israel from the chaos of the sinful human nature left unchecked. It provided structure to a new society and defined good and evil. Without the Law as a guide, Israel would have looked no different from the sinful, pagan nations of its time. On a deeper level, the Law revealed God's holiness and the extremely high standards needed to have a relationship with Him. It also revealed how far short we fall of these standards (v 10-11). Thus, the Law became "our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (v 24). It revealed how powerless we are to change ourselves and how greatly we needed a Saviour.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Search your heart. Are there any areas where you believe that you can earn your salvation with good works?
2. In the North American Church, we often take salvation for granted. Having new life and being saved from our sins have become cliché phrases that ignite apathy, instead of foundational truths that ignite passion. Reflect on why salvation through faith is so wonderful, asking God for revelation into this question. Write down what comes to mind and spend time thanking Jesus for this gift. For example, you may write down "Salvation is a beautiful gift because I do not have to earn it." You can then thank Jesus that He is powerful enough to save, that He loves you enough to choose to save you, that you did not have to have your act together before receiving salvation, etc.
3. Regardless of any other factors, the Church can find unity through our common faith in Jesus Christ (v 26-29). Pray for unity in the Church today. Pray that we would set aside cultural differences and personal preferences (for example, styles of worship) and love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that old wounds caused by division would heal. Pray for unity specifically across denominational lines. Pray that with this newfound unity, the Church would move forward powerfully to accomplish God's mission of making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

DAY 5



READ: Galatians 4

Galatians 4 begins with a summary of Paul's message in Galatians 3. Life under the law was similar to being an heir and a child: you have been promised an inheritance, but have not yet received it (v 1-2). Life under Christ can then be compared to life as an adult heir: you have been promised redemption since God first spoke to Abraham and because of Jesus have been able to receive that redemption. What a glorious gift this is for those who love Christ (v 3-7)!

Now that he has fully laid out the truth, Paul makes a passionate plea to the Galatians. "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who

by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” Paul reminds the Galatians of the fire that once burned in their hearts (v 13-15). He warns them against becoming so caught up in observing Jewish customs, such as festivals, that they lose the heart of the Gospel (v 10-11).

Paul closes his plea with yet another illustration of what it means to be a slave vs. a free person. The Holy Spirit guided Paul to use Hagar and Sarah (Genesis 15-21) to represent the slave and the free person. Ishmael was born to Abraham and Hagar. He was the result of taking God’s promise (Genesis 12) and trying to fulfill it by human effort. In the same way, when we live by the law we are trying to receive salvation by human effort. Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. He was the miraculous result of God’s power, as Sarah was barren. When we receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we are allowing God to miraculously fulfill His promise in the way only He can.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Passion is a wonderful thing, “provided the purpose is good” (v 18)! God is passionate! He gave us the ability to feel passion so that we too would be motivated to fulfill good purposes. What are you passionate about? Ask God if your passion is directed at good purposes. Ask Him if there is anything He wants you to grow in passion for.
2. Paul first preached the Gospel to the Galatians because he was sick (4:13). God often allows negative circumstances in our lives because He desires to use them for eternal purposes, bringing Himself glory. Ask God if He desires to use anything negative in your life to build His kingdom.
3. Paul passionately fought for the hearts of the Galatians. He cared about their salvation deeply (v 19). There is a battle raging for the hearts and minds of the Church today. There are many false doctrines being spread by demons. Pray for truth to reign over the Church. Pray that Christians would saturate themselves in Biblical truth, so they would know false doctrines from true ones. Pray that the Holy Spirit would pour out the gift of discernment, a tool greatly needed in our world. Pray especially for young people, who are forming their core beliefs in an age when Christianity is becoming increasingly marginalized. Pray for boldness for believers to stand for truth.

DAY 6

 **READ:** Galatians 5

Christ has set us free. We are no longer obligated to fulfill the entire law in order to please God (v 1). What good news for imperfect people like ourselves! We must choose to remain in this freedom daily. This means fully placing our trust in Him by acknowledging that we can do nothing to make ourselves blameless. Paul illustrates this truth with the example of circumcision (v 2-6). By making salvation dependent on our work, we deny Jesus’ power to fully liberate us from bondage to

sin and death. Christ demands our entire hearts. By denying His power in one area, we effectively deny His power in our entire lives.

Now that he has hammered against legalism, Paul addresses people on the other side of the matter. People, by nature, overcorrect. When we learn that one extreme is bad, we often swing to the opposite extreme. Paul addresses this tendency when he writes this: “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (v 13). To say that we are released from the Law does not mean that our actions do not matter. We are still called to deny sin and practice love (v 13-23). However, the motivation behind our actions changes when we live under freedom. Previously, we tried to live well in order to make ourselves right before God. Now we are obey not out of fear, but out of love. We obey because we are grateful for what Christ has done and we want to give our lives back to Him as a gift. We obey as children wholly loved by our Father. When the Holy Spirit is alive and active in our hearts, we begin to obey not because we have to, but because we eagerly desire to!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Reflect on the nature of your obedience. Do you seek to obey God? Why or why not? Ask God to show you why an obedient life is pleasing to Him.
2. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (v 23). Ask God to show you where these traits have been evident in your life. How have you grown in these lately? Receive His encouragement – these characteristics are tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in your life!
3. People who live in repeated, unrepentant sin “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v 21b). Spend some time in confession today on behalf of the Church in Canada. Jesus is returning for a pure bride. Reflect on our sins and the broken nature of Christ’s bride in our nation. If you need a place to start, you can begin with the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21. Acknowledge that the Church has displayed both legalism and outright sin, but has forgotten the power of Christ’s grace. Ask God to help us to do what we can: denying sin because we love Him and He is worthy of our praise. Ask Him to help us trust Him to do what we cannot: making us wholly pure and blameless before Him.

DAY 7



READ: Galatians 6

Galatians 6 contains further instruction about how the Christian life is to look. First, Paul addresses how we relate to other believers. Our sinful nature is tempted to become prideful when we catch people in sin. Instead, we are to humbly help our brothers and sisters regain their footing in their walk with Christ (v 1-3). The Church is Christ’s body. We are the practical means He uses to do ministry in our world. We must serve one another in love (v 3).

Paul also discusses the principle of sowing and reaping. We must all live with the results of our actions. No farmer would plant corn and expect to grow a harvest of

wheat. That would be ludicrous. In the same way, if we invest our resources (time, energy, money, etc.) in sinful pursuits, we cannot expect to gather a harvest of righteousness. Along with a warning about investing in the flesh, this illustration carries a promise. If we sow into the Spirit, we *will* gather a harvest of the Spirit. The time we spend in prayer will produce fruit. The choices we make to deny sin and follow righteousness, even when it is difficult or costly, will result in Christlike character. The sacrifices we make on behalf of others will result in reward in heaven. How wonderful it is that our struggles and sacrifices today will produce a massive harvest in eternity!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Reflect on your life. Do you typically sow into the Spirit or into the flesh? Ask God to show you how your view of eternity affects where you sow.
2. Look back over your thoughts about the Law of Moses from Day 1 of this devotional. Has anything changed as a result of studying Galatians? If you still have questions regarding Mosaic Law, Southland has many wonderful resources including a message series (“The Law and the Old Testament”) and a doctrinal paper (“The Law is still applicable, good and indispensable”), which are available for free on our website.
3. Paul closes his letter to the Galatians by praying that Jesus would give them grace (v 18). The Holy Spirit had used this letter to call the Galatian church to higher standards. They would fail if they strived for these standards by human effort alone. Ask God to highlight some people in your life who earnestly desire to grow in their walks with Him. Pray for His grace to empower them. Also pray for a filling of grace in your life!

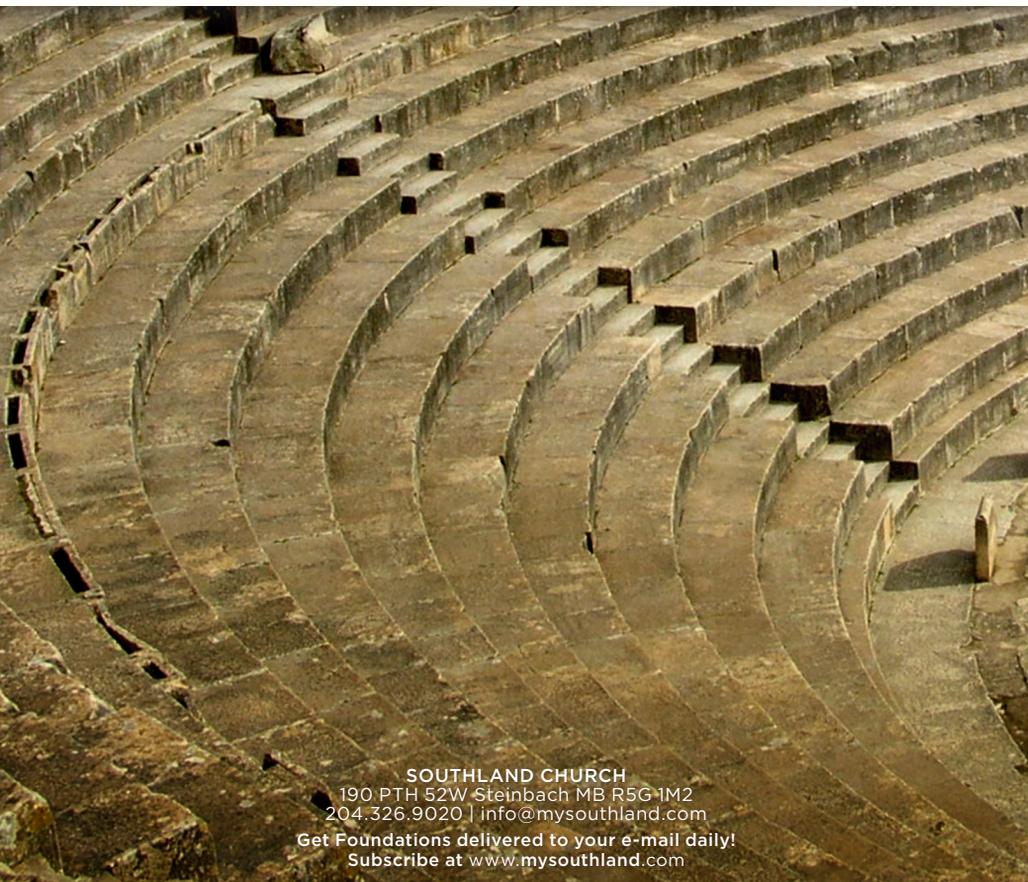


The Epistle to the Galatians

The heart of Galatians revolves around the role of Mosaic Law for Christians. Since God gave the Law at Mount Sinai, His people have been trying to draw closer to Him through obedience. How has this changed through the Cross? Paul writes to the Galatians to reinforce the importance of salvation through faith alone, while acknowledging the reality that a life surrendered to Christ will display the fruit of righteousness.

Galatians 5:1 (NIV)

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."



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